



Talking About Gambling Harm

Having Difficult Conversations with
Someone You Care About



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Having Difficult Conversations with Someone You Care About

Talking about gambling harm can feel incredibly difficult.

You may be worried about saying the wrong thing, upsetting someone, damaging your relationship, or making the situation worse. You might have been carrying concerns for weeks, months, or even years before feeling ready to raise them.

Many affected others describe feeling stuck between wanting to help and not knowing how to start the conversation.

At Recover with Pride, we understand that there is no perfect script. Every relationship is different, and every conversation will be shaped by individual circumstances. However, there are ways to approach conversations that can increase the chances of being heard whilst protecting your own wellbeing.



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Why These Conversations Feel So Difficult

Gambling harm often thrives in secrecy.

Unlike some other harms, there may be no obvious physical signs. Concerns can build gradually before they become visible to others.

You may be worried about:

- Damaging the relationship.
- Being accused of interfering.
- Being proved wrong.
- Making someone feel ashamed.
- Triggering anger or defensiveness.
- Learning information you are not prepared to hear.

These concerns are entirely normal.

Having the conversation can still be worthwhile, even if it feels uncomfortable.

Recognising When a Conversation May Be Needed

You may have noticed:

- Changes in financial behaviour.
- Increased secrecy.
- Mood changes.
- Borrowing money.
- Withdrawal from friends and family.
- Frequent conversations about betting, gambling, or winnings.
- Unexplained financial difficulties.
- Increased anxiety or stress.

You do not need proof of gambling harm before expressing concern.

It is okay to talk about changes you have noticed and how they are affecting you.

Choose the Right Time

A difficult conversation is more likely to be productive when everyone feels as calm and safe as possible.

Where possible:

- Choose a private setting.
- Avoid raising concerns during an argument.
- Avoid starting the conversation when either of you has been drinking alcohol or using substances.
- Allow enough time for discussion.
- Consider whether anyone else should be present.

You cannot control how someone responds, but creating the right environment can help.

Start with Concern, Not Accusation

People are often more receptive when conversations begin with care and concern rather than blame.

You might say:

- "I've noticed a few things recently, and I'm concerned about you."
- "I wanted to check in because you don't seem yourself."
- "I'm worried about how things have been lately."
- "I've noticed gambling seems to be taking up a lot of your time."
- "I care about you and wanted to talk about what's been happening."

This approach focuses on your observations rather than assumptions.

Talk About What You Have Seen

Focus on facts rather than accusations.

For example:

Instead of:

"You're clearly hiding things from me."

Consider:

"I've noticed some transactions I don't understand, and I'm worried about what they might mean."

Instead of:

"You've got a gambling problem."

Consider:

"I'm concerned that gambling may be causing difficulties for you."

People are generally more likely to engage when they feel they are being listened to rather than judged.

Listen as Much as You Speak

When we are worried about someone, it can be tempting to focus on what we want to say.

However, creating space for the other person to talk can be equally important.

Try to:

- Listen without interrupting.
- Ask open questions.
- Stay curious.
- Avoid assuming you already know everything.
- Acknowledge their feelings.

Examples include:

- "Can you help me understand what's been happening?"
- "How are you feeling about all of this?"
- "What has gambling been doing for you?"
- "Have you been finding things difficult recently?"

You do not need to agree with everything someone says in order to listen respectfully.

Prepare for Different Responses

People respond to concerns in different ways.

Some may:

- Admit there is a problem.
- Feel relieved to talk.
- Become emotional.
- Deny any issue exists.
- Become defensive.
- Change the subject.
- Refuse to engage.

Try to remember that someone's initial reaction is not always their final response.
Many people need time to process difficult conversations.

If Someone Becomes Defensive

Defensiveness can be upsetting, especially if you have built up the courage to speak.

If this happens:

- Stay calm where possible.
- Avoid escalating the argument.
- Focus on your concerns rather than proving a point.
- Take a break if emotions become overwhelming.
- Return to the conversation later if needed.

Remember, your role is not to force someone to admit there is a problem.

Your role is to communicate your concerns honestly and respectfully.

Talking to a Partner

For partners, conversations about gambling can feel particularly personal.

You may be navigating:

- Loss of trust.
- Financial concerns.
- Relationship difficulties.
- Questions about the future.

It is important to communicate both your concerns about the gambling and the impact it is having on you.

For example:

- "I'm worried about the gambling."
- "I'm finding it difficult to trust what I'm being told."
- "I'm feeling anxious about our finances."
- "This is having an impact on my wellbeing."

Your experiences matter too.

Talking to an Adult Child

Many parents tell us they struggle to balance concern with respecting their adult child's independence.

You may feel torn between:

- Wanting to protect them.
- Wanting to solve the problem.
- Respecting their autonomy.

It can help to focus on support rather than control.

You might say:

- "I'm here if you want to talk."
- "I'm concerned about what you're going through."
- "You don't have to manage this alone."

Parents often carry enormous emotional burdens when an adult child is experiencing gambling harm. Remember that you deserve support as well.

Talking to Friends, Chosen Family and Community Members

Within LGBTQ+ communities, chosen family relationships often play a vital role.

You may be supporting:

- A close friend.
- A chosen family member.
- A former partner.
- A flatmate.
- Someone within your community network.

You do not need a formal family relationship to have an important conversation.

If someone's gambling is affecting them or affecting you, it is okay to express concern.

Approaching Someone You Are Not Close To

Sometimes concerns arise about a colleague, acquaintance, community member, or somebody within your wider network.

You may worry that it is not your place to say anything.

In these situations:

- Focus on observable concerns.
- Avoid assumptions.
- Respect boundaries.
- Offer information rather than advice.
- Signpost support where appropriate.

Even a simple conversation can help someone feel less alone.

What If They Don't Want Help?

This can be one of the most frustrating outcomes.
You may feel rejected, disappointed, or helpless.

If someone is not ready to seek support:

- Continue looking after yourself.
- Maintain healthy boundaries.
- Avoid repeatedly arguing about gambling.
- Focus on what you can control.
- Seek support for yourself if needed.

You cannot force someone into recovery.
You can only decide how you respond.

Remember Your Own Needs

Many affected others become so focused on the other person that they forget their own wellbeing.

Ask yourself:

- How is this affecting me?
- What support do I need?
- What boundaries might help?
- Am I carrying responsibilities that aren't mine to carry?

You deserve support regardless of whether the other person chooses to seek help.

LGBTQ+ Considerations

Some LGBTQ+ people may have experienced:

- Rejection.
- Discrimination.
- Stigma.
- Difficult experiences with services.
- Concerns about confidentiality.

These experiences can make conversations about gambling harm feel even more vulnerable.

Approaching discussions with empathy, curiosity, and respect can help create a safer environment for honest conversations.

It is also important to remember that many affected others supporting LGBTQ+ individuals may not identify as LGBTQ+ themselves. Their experiences are equally valid, and support is available to them too.

How Recover with Pride Can Help

At Recover with Pride, we help affected others navigate difficult conversations about gambling harm.

We can support you to:

- Build confidence in having conversations.
- Better understand gambling harm.
- Explore healthy communication strategies.
- Develop boundaries.
- Reduce feelings of isolation.
- Access supportive resources.

You do not need to have all the right words.

Sometimes starting the conversation is the most important step.



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Key Takeaway

Talking about gambling harm is rarely easy, but difficult conversations can create opportunities for honesty, understanding, and change.

You cannot control how someone responds, but you can communicate your concerns with care, compassion, and honesty.

Most importantly, remember:

You do not need to carry these conversations, or their consequences, alone. Support is available for affected others too.

Key Message

You don't need to be an expert to start a conversation about gambling harm. Speaking with honesty, care and compassion can be the first step towards reducing secrecy, increasing understanding, and helping both yourself and the person you care about move forward.

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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Support for Affected Others



Aila

Aila is a website for women in Scotland experiencing or affected by gambling harm, developed by women with lived and living experience. If you are being harmed by someone else's gambling, Aila brings together emotional support, financial and debt advice, and practical guidance on navigating conversations and setting boundaries, helping you find the right service at the right time. Our monthly Living Room offers a welcoming in-person and online space for women affected by their own or someone else's gambling, and the Lived and Living Library shares stories from women across Scotland. You are not alone.

Links

Website

aila-scotland.co.uk/explore-available-support/support-for-affected-others/

aila-scotland.co.uk/explore-available-support/are-you-supporting-someone-else/

aila-scotland.co.uk

Contact

hello@aila-scotland.co.uk



Ara

Ara provides free support for people across the South West affected by someone else's gambling, including partners, family members, friends and colleagues. Support includes one-to-one counselling delivered face-to-face, by telephone or online by professionally accredited, CBT-qualified counsellors. Sessions focus on emotional wellbeing, coping strategies, recovery and rebuilding confidence.

Ara also offers specialist relationship counselling support, where gambling has impacted trust, communication, finances or family life, helping people to rebuild relationships and move forward together. In addition, our easy access workshops provide practical advice, digital safety support, understanding gambling-related harms, and action planning for those seeking support at the earliest opportunity.

Links

Website

www.recovery4all.co.uk/

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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Support for Affected Others



Betknowmore UK

Behind every person experiencing gambling harm, an estimated 6-10 other people may be affected.

A partner losing sleep. A parent caught between worry and responsibility. A young person living with tension in their home. A friend who wants to help but doesn't know how. A colleague covering up mistakes at work.

If this is you, Betknowmore UK is right behind you.

We offer digital peer support service for anyone aged 18 and above. Our Peer Supporters have City and Guilds assured training and lived experience of gambling harms. They understand what you are going through.

Supporting you through shared lived experience

As part of the statutory levy, Betknowmore UK is funded to provide 1:1 and group support to affected others in England and Scotland.

This support aims to ensure that through peer-led engagement and intervention, people are offered the most appropriate support to address their specific needs.

Links

Website

www.betknowmoreuk.org/affected-other

Breakeven

Breakeven

Breakeven offers counselling support for partners, family members and friends affected by someone else's gambling. Gambling harm can put pressure on relationships, finances and the wider household, and support is available for you too.

You can receive support even if the person who gambles is not ready to seek help. Breakeven works with affected family members and friends to help them understand their experiences and find ways to cope with the impact.

Its family and friends resources also offer guidance on looking after yourself, understanding gambling harms and having supportive, non-judgemental conversations.

Links

Website

www.breakeven.org.uk/family-and-friends

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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Support for Affected Others



Chances

As part of Cyrenians' homelessness prevention strategy – Chances offers person-centred, non-judgemental, and non-time limited support to anyone aged 16+ in Scotland who is impacted by gambling harm. For affected others - the service adopts a Community Reinforcement & Family Training approach focused on their recovery and not the person gambling and supports with:

- Promoting self-care, general wellbeing, independence, and boundary setting
- Understanding gambling behaviour and a loved one's triggers
- Improving communication with the person gambling through positive reinforcement techniques
- Guidance & tools to encourage the person gambling to reduce the harms experienced

Online and phone options are offered Scotland wide and in-person in Edinburgh, the Lothians and Falkirk. Organisational and self-referrals are welcome via email or phone on **07983 137239**. Alternatively, a referral form can be completed (available upon request).

Links

Website

[Chances: Gambling Support](#)

Contact

[07983 137239](tel:07983137239)

chances@cyrenians.scot



Gambling Recovery Therapy

Founded by Lorraine Perrons and Claire Jones, Gambling Recovery for All CIC and Gambling Recovery Therapy Limited combine family experience of gambling harm with specialist professional training.

The CIC's Rebuild & Rise: Reclaim Your Life is a fully funded, trauma-informed 12-week online programme for eligible women across the UK affected by someone else's gambling. It focuses on emotional wellbeing, financial resilience, boundaries, confidence and rebuilding a sense of choice and control. Women can seek support whether or not the person who gambles has stopped or sought help.

Gambling Recovery Therapy Limited also offers private paid one-to-one therapy for people experiencing gambling harm and those affected by someone else's gambling, with a complimentary 30-minute introductory conversation.

Links

Website

www.gamblingrecoverytherapy.com/affected-other

forms.gle/aMA4fJbgDMSpg0Tb9

www.gamblingrecoverytherapy.com/brochure

Contact

contact@gamblingrecoverytherapy.com

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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Support for Affected Others



Recover Together

Recover Together provides a safe and supportive space for people affected by gambling harm, including family members, partners, friends and others impacted by someone else's gambling. Reaching out can feel difficult, and people may not always know what support they need or where to start. We're here to listen and walk alongside them, helping them find a way forward that feels right for them. Our approach is shaped by lived experience of gambling harm and recovery, and we meet people with empathy, honesty and no judgement, providing support, understanding and connection.

Links

Website

recoverttogether.org/what-we-do/affected-others/



Shiltons' Silverlining

Shiltons' Silverlining supports partners, family members, friends and loved ones affected by someone else's gambling. Its Affected Others service offers a confidential space to talk, be heard and feel understood.

The charity recognises that someone else's gambling can bring anxiety, financial pressure, relationship difficulties and isolation. It offers emotional support, guidance and information to help people cope with the impact and find a way forward.

Built on lived experience, the service recognises that affected family members and friends need support for their own mental health, wellbeing and relationships too.

Links

Website

shiltonssilverlining.org/affected-others/

Refer for support here:

www.switchboard.org.uk/service/recover-with-pride/referral/



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